

Dear friends,

As some of you know, I work at a program for adults with disabilities. Our program consists of going on daily trips. Yesterday we went to Frootogo Orchards in Waterdown but didn't stay for very long. When we arrived, the owner approached us saying that I should've called ahead of time to let her know that 'challenged' people were coming so she could 'warn' her staff. She then went on saying that she felt that her staff were unsafe and that she was concerned for their safety because 'mentally handicapped' people were there. I told her that our participants are safe and not 'dangerous' like she implied. She still seemed uneasy and continued calling the participants 'challenged' and 'handicapped'.

She commented about our participants with wheelchairs as well. When she saw our wheelchair bus she said, "I hope you don't have a bus full of wheelchairs coming." Then later stated that she didn't mind if a couple wheelchairs went inside the store... only a couple, not all. She then started talking about a group of people who had visited in the past and said, "Last time you people were here there were six wheelchairs and no staff with them and they fell down a hill." Funny thing is, today was the first day that any of our programs went to this particular farm. So I told her that we had never been there before and that clearly this would be the first and last time we would be visiting. She apologized and said that she didn't mean to come across as rude but I knew that her apology was not sincere. Basically, it seemed like we were unwanted there and so I decided that we would leave because I was not willing to subject the participants to this kind of discrimination.

At first she said she was upset because I didn't call ahead of time to let her know that 'challenged' people would be coming so she could let her staff know. When I questioned her on that and let her know that she was being ignorant, she changed up her story. She said that she was upset because I didn't call ahead to let her know that buses would be coming and that the schools who come always call ahead. I told her that we are not a school and that the website didn't say anything about calling to inform them that we would be coming. She replied, "Well you should just know to do that." I questioned her again and said, "So if we came here today in a couple of vans instead of a bus, you wouldn't be having any problems right now?" She replied by saying that the only problem was with the bus. Of course, I questioned her again saying, "You said earlier that you wanted a warning call to let you know that people with disabilities would be coming and said nothing about a bus." She just stood there and said nothing. I continued, "I figured that because this is a public place that everyone would be welcome and that I wouldn't have to call ahead of time to let anyone know that we would be coming." Again, she just stared at me and had nothing to say.

Before we left, I told her that I didn't appreciate the way she was acting or the

language she was using. When she found out we were leaving she offered nothing to us and it was clear that she never wanted us there to begin with. I also informed her that I would be telling everyone I know not to go there, so this is what I'm doing now. Her words and actions were cruel, ignorant and completely unnecessary. The way she acted upset me but I knew that I had to be strong and advocate for these participants who I care so deeply about and am lucky to call my friends. What this woman did was offensive and uncalled for because no one should be treated the way she treated my participants. Clearly there are issues regarding human rights here. I refuse to let this woman get away with what she did and will do everything I can to support and advocate for my friends. You haven't heard the last of me, Willy.